

Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament
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Anglers Earn Over 5400 Citations in 2005

Anglers registered 5423 trophy-size fish for Citation awards during the 48th Annual Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, which ran from January 1st through December 31st last year. This was the seventh highest total in Tournament history, continuing the recent trend. The top four years in Tournament history occurred from 2001-2004.

Summer flounder accounted for the largest number of Citations among the 34 eligible species. The 937 flounder Citations was the fourth highest number of Citations issued for the species in the program's history and easily the largest number since the Citation minimum was increased to 7 pounds. They represented 17% of all Citation awards earned last year. The largest fish weighed over 17 pounds, a scant few ounces under the current state record, and 65 fish weighed 10 pounds or more.

Anglers registered 770 red drum for Citation awards, which was 14% of awards earned last year. This was the second highest number ever, topped only by the 808 Citation awards earned in 2003. The spring/early summer fishery for red drum, which was not as productive as it has been in recent years, was more than offset by a splendid run of fish on the Little Island Fishing Pier in the Sandbridge area of Virginia Beach in September. Pier anglers decked more 210 award-winning red drum.

The sheepshead fishery continued to grow and produced 575 Citation awards – more than double the prior year's total of 262. This was the largest number ever registered and was achieved despite increasing the minimum qualifying standards. The minimum weight for sheepshead Citations was raised to from 7 to 9 pounds in 2005, and the qualifying length for release awards was increased by an inch to 22 inches.

Spot Citations fell dramatically from the record level of 2081 fish reached in 2004. Even so, the 366 fish registered was the 11th highest ever. The large decline probably was a result of the very late appearance of large spot, with most caught well after October 15th, and the increase in the Citation minimum from 1 pound to 1 lb., 2 oz.

Striped bass Citation numbers fell to 423, the lowest level since 1997. Despite the relatively poor showing of large stripers, anglers had their best opportunity to join the "50-Pound Club". Fifty-one fish weighing 50 pounds or more were registered for Citations, easily eclipsing the prior year's total of 29, which fell to second place.

Two new state records were established during 2005. On January 2nd, Paul W. Kleckner of Greenbackville captured a 63-lb., 8-oz. striped bass in the Atlantic Ocean off Wachapreague. Then, on October 6th, Arun Nhek of Newport News established a new sheepshead record with a

20-lb., 12-oz. fish caught on the Seagull Fishing Pier at the First Island of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel.

Forty-nine anglers registered at least six different species of fish for Citation awards and qualified as Virginia Expert Saltwater Anglers. This is the smallest number to qualify since 2000. A list of the anglers earning expert angler status and their catches is attached.

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament is operated by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission with funding provided by the Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing License. Awards are made to anglers catching fish meeting established weight criteria in 23 species. In addition, awards for the catch and release of fish are available in 34 species.

Citation awards are full color certificates delivered at the recipient's choice as a plaque or in a plastic album page. Special awards are presented to anglers meeting the eligibility requirements of the Master Angler and Expert Angler programs.

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